

RUSSIA: Female circumcision as senseless cruelty

Society acted for observing the rights of women of the northern Caucasus

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Religiia i Pravo (26.08.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2cMGYZt> – A genuine squall of emotions was evoked by a recent statement of one of the prominent Muslim leaders of Russia with regard to so-called “female circumcision.” At first, the chairman of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the northern Caucasus, Ismail Berdiev, declared that this is a good measure which supposedly “decreases the sexuality of women” and lowers the level of depravity in society. Then, after a wave of criticism against him, the mufti was forced to excuse himself. Berdiev noted that, of course, Islam does not prescribe doing “female circumcision,” but it is practiced in the rural region of Dagestan.

Perhaps few in Russian society knew what “female circumcision” is, but having learned, they were horrified by this barbarian practice, which essentially cripples women. In Russia, religious associations are liquidated on trumped up charges and their literature is ruled to be extremist (as, for example, with Jehovah’s Witnesses), but in this case the call rang out to inflict damage to the physical health of citizens from a religious leader. According to article 14 of the federal law on freedom of conscience, such calls are reason for an examination and they provide for a sanction all the way up to liquidation and prohibition of the activity of a religious association.

Of course, it is hardly likely that such measures will be applied to the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the northern Caucasus, much less to the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of the Karachay-Cherkess republic, which Ismail Berdiev also heads. In addition, for two decades Mufti Berdiev has been one of the most distinguished leaders of traditional Islam. Berdiev is a good politician and leader, because of whom to a great extent Karachay-Cherkess is considered one of the most peaceful republics of the northern Caucasus.

Nevertheless Ismail Berdiev tried to disavow his statement: "I do not call for circumcising women. This is not prescribed by Islam and it is simply impossible. I am speaking about the problem of depravity and about how a problem exists about which it is necessary to do something." However a sore subject has already been touched upon.

The office of prosecutor general of Russia received an appeal requesting an examination of the legality of the use of so-called "female circumcision" in the northern Caucasus. The author of the appeal was Diana Gurtskaia, a member of the Public Chamber of the RF. Before that a report about the practice of female circumcision in Dagestan was posted on the official website of the rights advocacy foundation "Legal Initiative." It noted, in particular, that the consequences of the operations are connected with a reduction of sensitivity and sexual desire in women who are subjected to this procedure. The report says that this is confirmed by both respondents practicing it and expert physicians. Female circumcision in the region is used mainly in mountain villages in Tsumadin, Botlikh, Tsuntin, and Bezhtinsk regions. As noted, girls up to three years of age are subjected to the

operation and in rare cases, up to twelve years. Female circumcision is very rarely performed in a hospital, and frequently after an underground operation inflammation and bleeding occur.

Naturally the Ministry of Health also responded to this problem. An official representative of the Ministry of Health, Oleg Salagai, noted: "At the present time, the international medical community is agreed in the opinion that so-called female circumcision is a mutilating practice and it produces nothing positive."

It turned out that back in 2008 the World Assembly of Health adopted a resolution about the necessity of total rejection of this practice. In 2012 a similar resolution was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

A separate discussion was evoked by the moral aspect of this barbaric practice. The point is that initially Ismail Berdiev presented female circumcision as a good means to fight depravity. The mufti said, "If this were applied to all women, that would be very good. The Almighty created woman in order that she give birth to children and raise them. And this has nothing to do with that. Women do not cease to give birth because of this. But there would be less depravity."

In this case, the northern Caucasian leader was even corrected by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia. The head of the Department of Public Relations of FEOR, Borukh Gorin, cautiously noted that he understands "a man who thinks about how to combat debauchery and licentiousness in society. A

believing person is surrounded by an enormous number of temptations." But nevertheless one is called to struggle with debauchery with spiritual means and not with physical correction of the human organism. Gorin said: "Destruction of depravity around us is not within our powers. It is in our powers to sanctify the space around us so that there simply is no place left for debauchery. In the book of the Song of Solomon and the psalms of David it is said that the honor of woman is within, true beauty, and true greatness is not flashy, not public, and in this sense nothing has changed since the time of King Solomon and King David."

Borukh Gorin called attention to how girls should be trained: "The genuine attention of a groom, a man, can be attracted only by internal beauty. Therefore, in working on fitness, on how your body appears, a girl should understand that she should work three times as much on her inner appearance and contents. Only by this will she be able to attract true love."

Finally, it would seem that an end to the attitude of Muslims toward female circumcision has been placed by the first deputy chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, Rushan Abbasov. In his opinion, the practice is totally alien to Islam: "Female circumcision is a pre-Islamic tradition, which was innate not only to the Arab world but also to other civilizations that were not in contact with the Semitic world. It is possible to say with certainty that female circumcision is more on an ethnic tradition, mainly innate to the African peoples, possibly having some ritual basis, and it is completely alien to Islamic ideology." "

In the understanding of Muslims, the Almighty forbids doing any injury to one's body, and as regards male circumcision,

this does not have any direct command in the Quran, but according to the Abrahamic tradition it is desirable. Hadiths of the Prophet which contain mention of female circumcision do not have status of reliability, which consequently does not permit their use as an argument.

The discussion about the statement on female circumcision by Ismail Berdiev has raised more profound problems about the position of women in Islam. But at the present time one would like to hope that the practice which is crippling girls in remote villages will be eradicated. This is the way this practice is treated in Africa, to which the attention of the world community has been turned for a long time. And in this case religious leaders can and should raise their voice in defense of women.

Background articles:

Muslim female circumcision goes viral in Russian media

August 18, 2016

Numerous leaders in Moscow take on female circumcision question

August 19, 2016

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